

THE CHAIRMANSHIP OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF



JOINT HISTORY OFFICE
OFFICE OF THE CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF

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FOREWORD

This study of the chairmanship traces the evolution of the position from its World War II origins through the first post-Cold War chairmanship. It sketches the careers of my predecessors from Omar Bradley through Colin Powell and those of the first two Vice Chairmen. In doing so, the book shows how each dealt with a wide variety of political, diplomatic, and military challenges. Its brief accounts of the histories of “The Tank,” the Chairman’s flag, the Joint Chiefs of Staff badge, and the designation of an official residence for the Chairman provide additional information about the Office of the Chairman. I think that all who are interested in the institutional development of the US military will find the book instructive.

JOHN M. SHALIKASHVILI
Chairman
of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

PREFACE

Soon after their first formal meeting in early 1942, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recognized the need for a senior officer to preside over their activities and maintain daily contact with the President. Appointed Chief of Staff to the Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy in July 1942, Admiral William D. Leahy remained in that position until his retirement in 1949. In the 1949 amendments to the National Security Act of 1947, Congress created the post of Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to continue the duties performed by Admiral Leahy. Since then, the role and responsibilities of the Chairman have increased greatly. *The Chairmanship of the Joint Chiefs of Staff* describes the creation and evolution of the Chairman's position and presents brief biographical sketches of the men who have occupied it.

This book follows an earlier work, *The Chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff* by Willard J. Webb and Ronald H. Cole. That volume has been revised and augmented with additional material by Dr. Cole, Lorna S. Jaffe, and Walter S. Poole. Frank N. Schubert also contributed to the project. Penny Norman and Helga Echols typed the manuscript, and Ms. Norman prepared the volume for publication.

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DAVID A. ARMSTRONG
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THE ROLE OF THE CHAIRMAN



General Colin L. Powell and four of his predecessors join Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney to dedicate the Chairmen, Joint Chiefs of Staff Corridor at the Pentagon, 17 July 1991. Cutting the ribbon with General Powell is Admiral Thomas H. Moorer. *Left to right* behind them are Admiral William J. Crowe, Jr.; General John W. Vessey, Jr.; General David C. Jones; Mrs. Moorer; and Mrs. Powell.

THE ROLE OF THE CHAIRMAN

The position of Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff dates from 1949; its antecedents trace back to the World War II experience of the Joint Chiefs. From the enactment of the National Security Act Amendments of 1949 that created the position and the designation of General Omar N. Bradley as the first Chairman on 16 August of that year through the retirement of General Colin L. Powell on 30 September 1993, twelve officers served in the position. The years during which these men occupied the office saw a gradual but steady growth in the prestige, influence, and authority of the Chairman.

Coalescence of the Joint Chiefs during World War II

The Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) came into being in February 1942. Their creation was not the result of a specific decision or plan. Rather, they coalesced in response to a need. Initially, no thought was given to the need for any sort of presiding officer or chairman.

Following the Pearl Harbor attack and the entry of the United States into World War II in December 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston S. Churchill met with their military advisers in Washington to plan a coordinated effort against the Axis powers. At that time, the two allied leaders established the Combined Chiefs of Staff (CCS) to carry out the strategic direction of the US-British war effort. British representation for the new organization consisted of the Chiefs of Staff Committee,

composed of the heads of the British armed services, who had met as a body for almost twenty years. Since the United States had no comparable group, the US officers whose positions and duties matched those of members of the British Chiefs of Staff Committee formed the US portion of the Combined Chiefs of Staff for the initial military discussions. These US representatives were never formally designated by the President or any other authority. They held their first formal meeting as the US Joint Chiefs of Staff on 9 February 1942. Thereafter, the Joint Chiefs of Staff not only served as the US half of the Combined Chiefs of Staff but also assumed responsibility for the planning and strategic direction of the US war effort. Subsequently, an organization and procedures evolved to support the Joint Chiefs in carrying out their responsibilities.

Initial membership of the Joint Chiefs of Staff consisted of four officers. General George C. Marshall, as Chief of Staff, represented the Army, while Navy representation was shared between Admiral Harold R. Stark, Chief of Naval Operations, and Admiral Ernest J. King, Commander in Chief, US Fleet. General Henry H. "Hap" Arnold, USA, Chief of the Army Air Forces, served as the fourth member.* He sat on the Joint Chiefs of Staff to serve as the counterpart to the Chief of the Air Staff in the Combined Chiefs of Staff. (Since the Royal Air Force had been a separate service since 1923, its chief was a member of the British Chiefs of Staff Committee.)¹

Soon the Joint Chiefs of Staff felt the need for an impartial presiding officer, free of service responsibilities, to guide their deliberations. They quickly recognized the necessity

for someone to act as their spokesman with the President as well. All the Chiefs sought almost daily contact with the President; yet both he and the Chiefs found it difficult to arrange busy schedules to accommodate their meetings. By the end of February 1942, General Marshall had suggested to President Roosevelt the appointment of a chairman for the Joint Chiefs, someone to be the chief of staff of the military services. But the President resisted the idea.²

Then, during March, Admiral Stark departed for a new command in London, and the positions of Chief of Naval Operations and Commander in Chief, US Fleet, were combined under Admiral King. With the JCS membership reduced to three, General Marshall grew concerned over Admiral King's likely reaction to the Army's having two representatives to the Navy's one. Marshall again raised the possibility of a chairman for the Joint Chiefs of Staff and suggested that the President appoint a naval officer. Specifically, he proposed Admiral William D. Leahy, a former Chief of Naval Operations and currently the US Ambassador to the French Government at Vichy.³

The President and Leahy enjoyed a long association dating back to the Navy Department in 1913, when Lieutenant Commander Leahy had worked closely with Assistant Secretary Roosevelt.

Admiral Leahy returned to Washington during June, and President Roosevelt called him to the White House. The President asked Leahy to serve as a special military adviser and presiding officer of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In subsequent talks they discussed Leahy's duties and decided upon the title of "Chief of Staff to the Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy."

Admiral Leahy reported for duty on 20 July 1942, and the President publicly announced the appointment the following

* When sitting as a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Arnold spoke only for the air forces of the Army and was always subordinate to General Marshall.



Admiral William D. Leahy presides over the World War II Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1944.
Left to right: General Henry H. Arnold, Chief of the Army Air Forces; General George C. Marshall, Chief of Staff, US Army; Admiral Leahy, Chief of Staff to the Commander in Chief; and Admiral Ernest J. King, Chief of Naval Operations.

day. The Admiral moved into an office at the White House and met with the President every morning. He briefed Roosevelt on the military situation, presented the JCS papers and recommendations that required decision, and received the President's guidance for the Chiefs. Leahy also became the fourth member and presiding officer of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.⁴

His role was best summed up in his own words: "The most important function of the Chief of Staff was the maintaining of daily liaison between the President and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. It was my job to pass on to the

Joint Chiefs the basic thinking of the President on all war plans and strategy. In turn I brought back from the Joint Chiefs a consensus of their thinking."⁵ Like the Joint Chiefs themselves, Admiral Leahy operated throughout the war without any formal directive or terms of reference. Roosevelt avoided issuing formal guidance in order to preserve the flexibility of both Admiral Leahy and the Chiefs to extend their activities as needed.

Admiral Leahy quickly developed a close relationship with President Roosevelt. He traveled with the President and had his own compartment in the President's private

railroad car. Communications facilities were provided to allow Leahy constant contact with his office in Washington. The Admiral became one of Roosevelt's closest advisers and, gradually, his role grew beyond the realm of military affairs. This development led General Marshall to comment later that Leahy became "more the Chief of Staff of the President and less the chairman of the Chiefs of Staff as time went on."⁶

Nevertheless, Leahy's relationship with and easy access to Roosevelt greatly eased the burdens of the Joint Chiefs of Staff during the war. Even so, he did remain the Chief of Staff to the President and his representative to the Joint Chiefs rather than functioning as chairman of the Joint Chiefs and the JCS representative to the President.

Postwar Reorganization and a Temporary Chairman

The Joint Chiefs of Staff continued without change after the end of World War II. The question of postwar organization of the armed forces, however, became the subject of intense and sometimes acrimonious debate. The result was the "unification" law. The National Security Act of 1947 created the National Military Establishment under a Secretary of Defense, gave legal sanction to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and established the US Air Force as a separate service.⁷

With respect to the Joint Chiefs, the National Security Act set out their responsibilities; authorized a Joint Staff; and spelled out the membership to include the Chief of Staff of the Army, the Chief of Naval Operations, the Chief of Staff of the Air Force, and the Chief of Staff to the Commander in Chief, "if there be one."⁸ The qualifying language concerning the Chief of Staff to the Commander in Chief reflected an understanding between congressional leaders and

the White House that Admiral Leahy would continue to hold the office as long as President Harry S Truman desired but no successor to Leahy would be appointed.

The National Security Act entered into force on 26 July 1947, and President Truman named James V. Forrestal as the first Secretary of Defense. In attempting to organize and bring the new National Military Establishment under his control, Forrestal soon encountered a number of problems, including relations with the Joint Chiefs of Staff. During 1948 the Joint Chiefs of Staff could not reach agreement on a national defense strategy or the associated questions of force levels and service budgets. This experience led Secretary Forrestal in his first annual report to call for the designation of a "responsible head" for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, one to whom he and the President could look for the best staff assistance on those matters for which the Joint Chiefs were responsible. Forrestal obviously believed that the position of Chief of Staff to the Commander in Chief no longer met his needs or those of the Chiefs, and since Admiral Leahy was in declining health and often absent, Forrestal called for abolition of the position.⁹

Forrestal's proposal required legislative changes in the National Security Act. As a temporary measure pending such a change, he considered asking General Dwight D. Eisenhower to serve for a short period as presiding officer of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. (Eisenhower had recently retired as Army Chief of Staff and was serving as president of Columbia University.) Forrestal raised the possibility with President Truman in November 1948.¹⁰

The President agreed and on 11 February 1949 announced that General Eisenhower would serve temporarily as principal military adviser and consultant to him and the Secretary of Defense and act as presiding officer of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.¹¹ Eisenhower had,

in fact, begun meeting with the Joint Chiefs of Staff in late January. These meetings continued intermittently from February through June. In all, Eisenhower, as temporary chairman, presided over twenty-four meetings and continued all the while as president of Columbia University, traveling to Washington for short visits especially to meet with the Chiefs.¹² In these sessions, he and the Chiefs considered the troublesome matters of the Fiscal Year (FY) 1951 budget and development of strategic plans. But Eisenhower's tour, which was abbreviated by illness, left major problems unresolved.¹³

While Eisenhower served as temporary chairman, examination of a more permanent solution to the problem proceeded. During 1948 the Commission on the Organization of the Executive Branch of the Government, headed by former President Herbert Hoover, had considered defense organization. The Hoover Commission formed a separate committee to review national security organization, and it recommended authority for the Secretary of Defense to appoint a chairman from among the members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to expedite their business.¹⁴

The parent Hoover Commission accepted this finding and in a report to Congress on 15 February 1949 called for a JCS chairman appointed by the President, though not from the members of the Joint Chiefs, to preside over the Chiefs.¹⁵

Establishment of the Position of Chairman

Subsequently, on 5 March 1949 President Truman called on Congress to enact changes to the National Security Act to achieve a more effective defense. He wanted the National Military Establishment converted into an executive department, known as the Department of Defense (DOD), with adequate

authority and military and civilian staff assistance for the Secretary of Defense to fulfill his increased responsibility as head of the new department. In addition, Truman asked Congress to provide for a chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to take precedence over all other military personnel, be the principal military adviser to the President and the Secretary of Defense, and perform such other duties as the President or Secretary might prescribe.¹⁶

Another factor contributed to the growing pressure for a chairman for the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Because of illness, Admiral Leahy asked to be relieved of his duties as Chief of Staff to the Commander in Chief, and President Truman accepted his resignation effective 21 March 1949.¹⁷ Thereupon, the position of Chief of Staff to the Commander in Chief lapsed.¹⁸

A few days before Leahy's resignation, the Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Millard Tydings of Maryland, introduced a bill to implement the President's proposal to revise the National Security Act. Included was provision for a chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff as requested by Truman.¹⁹

The Senate committee held lengthy hearings on this bill. Forrestal testified on the opening day, just before his resignation as Secretary of Defense. In his opinion, there needed to be a military person to whom the President and the Secretary of Defense could look for "the organization and evaluation of military judgment." The men who currently comprised the Joint Chiefs were each directing a particular service, Forrestal explained, and problems common to all must be organized and directed and the deliberations of the Chiefs focused by "someone who has a full-time preoccupation with that duty."²⁰

The Chiefs appeared as a body before the committee a few days later. They supported creation of the position of chairman but asked

for several changes in the proposed bill. They wanted a specific prohibition against the chairman's exercising command over the members of the Joint Chiefs or the services. They sought "to prevent having a single chief of staff" and to ensure that the services retained command over their own forces. Further, they wished it clearly stated that the chairman would serve as their principal military adviser to the President and the Secretary of Defense in his capacity as chairman and not as an individual.²¹

The committee did revise the bill to prohibit the chairman from exercising command over the Joint Chiefs or the services but left the provision naming the chairman the principal military adviser to the President and the Secretary of Defense unchanged.²² The Senate adopted this version, but the House did not include it.²³ It fell to a conference committee to reconcile the differences over revision of the National Security Act.

The resulting conference bill contained several changes. It provided for a chairman to be the presiding officer of the Joint Chiefs of Staff but stated that he "shall have no vote." Further, it named the Joint Chiefs rather than the chairman as the principal military advisers to the President, the National Security Council, and the Secretary of Defense. House conferees had insisted on these changes to preclude the chairman becoming a *de facto* chief of staff over the services. Both the House and Senate accepted the conference bill, and President Truman signed the National Security Act Amendments on 10 August 1949.²⁴

As finally approved, the Chairman's duties included serving as presiding officer of the Joint Chiefs; providing the agenda for JCS meetings and assisting the Joint Chiefs "to prosecute their business as promptly as practicable;" and informing the Secretary of Defense, and the President as appropriate, of issues when the Chiefs could not agree. The

National Security Act Amendments fixed the Chairman's term at two years with provision for reappointment for a second two-year term; in time of war, there would be no limit on the number of reappointments.

The New Chairman

On the following day, 11 August, President Truman nominated General Omar Bradley, Chief of Staff of the Army, to be the first Chairman. (The Hoover Commission's proposed ban upon appointing a Service Chief to be Chairman did not become law.) A distinguished combat leader in World War II, Bradley had been a strong advocate of unification both in the 1947 debate over adoption of the National Security Act and in the considerations to amend the act. Senate consent followed quickly, and General Bradley was sworn in as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 16 August 1949.²⁵

Almost immediately, General Bradley faced a major challenge to the role and authority of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. During the preceding eighteen months, JCS debate over the allocation of the military budget and the associated issue of strategic concepts had become increasingly difficult. The Air Force was dedicated to strategic (atomic) bombing while the Navy was equally attached to the role of carrier forces. The Air Force planned to build a new, improved strategic bomber, the B-36. The Navy wanted a new "super" carrier, USS *United States*, to handle larger planes that could carry atomic weapons and give the Navy a role in strategic warfare. The issue reached a climax on 23 April 1949, when the new Secretary of Defense, Louis Johnson, canceled construction of the USS *United States* for budgetary reasons. Senior naval officers viewed this act as confirmation of the anti-Navy bias of the administration and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and their anger and dismay



Secretary of Defense Louis A. Johnson swears in General Omar N. Bradley as the first Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 16 August 1949.

boiled over in what became known as “the revolt of the admirals.”

The resulting uproar led the House Armed Services Committee to investigate. Navy and Marine Corps officers used the investigation as a platform to voice their anger and dissatisfaction. They criticized recent strategic and budget decisions and castigated the strategy of reliance on strategic bombing. They also implied that consideration was being given to elimination of the Marine Corps. They attributed these decisions to misapplication of the JCS system and, by inference, challenged the entire unification effort.²⁶

General Bradley, as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, testified on 20 October. He

made a strong statement in support of unity and cooperation among the services. The armed forces, he said, belonged to the people and the people had decided:

we will have unification...we will have civilian control of the armed forces. In this I heartily agree.

Unwavering acceptance on the part of all leaders will strengthen the will, the spirit, and the morale of all members of the armed forces, and consequently, make stronger our entire national defense.

General Bradley rebutted the Navy charges and went on to pledge his firm belief in a strong Navy and the need for naval air

and Marine forces. "As long as I have been a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and as long as my membership continues," he assured the committee, "every decision in which I have participated was and will be made without bias toward any service or any person." He called upon all in the Department of Defense to work together. "Each of the three services," he continued, "has much to offer the other two, and each has much to learn."²⁷

The controversy subsided. President Truman replaced the Chief of Naval Operations, and the House Armed Services Committee indicated its approval of the concept of unification and, by implication, the Joint Chiefs of Staff. With the outbreak of the Korean War, the issue of service cooperation soon faded.

General Bradley lived up to his pledge to be a fair and impartial Chairman. In fact, he developed a reputation for "meticulous neutrality" in guiding the discussions of the Chiefs. One observer, General Maxwell D. Taylor, who would himself later become Chairman, related how as an Army deputy chief of staff he occasionally sat in JCS meetings when Bradley served as Chairman and could not tell whether Bradley was for or against some issues. "He simply steered the debate and the argumentation," Taylor said.²⁸

The Korean War brought an expansion of General Bradley's role as Chairman. He developed a special relationship with President Truman, becoming not only the Chiefs' representative to the President but also Truman's trusted military adviser. In the turbulent initial days of the conflict, Bradley briefed Truman every morning at the White House on the military situation and presented the recommendations of the Joint Chiefs. Later, as the danger of a US expulsion from Korea passed, Bradley met with the President on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays.²⁹ The Bradley-Truman relationship began the practice of the President and the Secretary of Defense

looking to the Chairman as the spokesman for the Joint Chiefs of Staff. (When Eisenhower became President in January 1953, Bradley met with him on a weekly basis.)³⁰

During the Korean War, Bradley also began to accompany the Secretary of Defense to National Security Council (NSC) meetings.³¹ He thus established the precedent that the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, although not a statutory member, attends the NSC meetings.

General Bradley completed his first term as Chairman in August 1951 and was reappointed for a second term. The previous September, Congress had passed special legislation promoting Bradley to five-star rank, emphasizing that the promotion resulted from Bradley's "many distinguished services" to his country and "not because of the position he holds as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff."³² On 22 September 1950 Bradley became a General of the Army, the only Chairman to achieve five-star rank.

The President's Advocate

When General Bradley completed his second term as Chairman in August 1953, President Eisenhower chose Admiral Arthur W. Radford to succeed him. Admiral Radford, as Commander in Chief, Pacific, had accompanied Eisenhower on a trip to Japan and Korea in December 1952 and had favorably impressed the President-elect.³³

President Eisenhower and Admiral Radford quickly developed a warm relationship. At an early meeting with Radford, Eisenhower indicated his desire for a weekly meeting with the Chairman. Radford responded with surprise, not realizing the President would want to see him so frequently. "Well, Raddy," Eisenhower replied, "if you don't mind, I'd like to continue the arrangement I've had with Brad, a meeting with you at 9:30



Admiral Arthur W. Radford emerges from the JCS area, 1954.

every Monday morning when we're both in the city." These weekly sessions continued until Eisenhower suffered a heart attack; thereafter, Radford saw the President less frequently. Throughout his tour Radford had an understanding with Eisenhower that he could call him, day or night, if Radford thought it necessary. Admiral Radford also established a close relationship with Secretary of Defense Charles Wilson and had a similar understanding about seeing the Secretary whenever he believed it necessary.³⁴

Shortly before Radford became Chairman, the position had acquired some new authority. During the presidential campaign the previous year, Eisenhower had called for a study of defense organization. Once in office, he kept his pledge and appointed a high-level committee for that purpose. Based on the committee's report, on 30 April 1953 the President proposed a reorganization of the Department of Defense. With regard to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, he wanted the Chairman to manage the work of the Joint Staff and its Director. He also recommended that selection of members of the Joint Staff be subject to the approval of the Chairman. He hoped the latter step would ensure the selection of officers who could rise above service partisanship to focus on national planning and strategy. President Eisenhower chose to accomplish these changes by means of a reorganization plan that could be implemented by executive order unless formally opposed by Congress. Accordingly, he submitted his plan on 30 April. Congress had sixty days to reject the plan, and when it did not do so, the plan took effect on 30 June 1953.³⁵

Admiral Radford was a strong Chairman, but he did not continue the Bradley tradition of an impartial presiding officer. Rather, he served as a major advocate of the Eisenhower administration policy of relying primarily upon the threat of massive nuclear

retaliation. Combative and outspoken, he exerted great pressure on the Chiefs to reach consensus. He did not want to send disagreements, or "splits" as they were known, to the Secretary of Defense. Splits, he feared, would eventually leak and cause embarrassment. Admiral Radford's role was characterized by some as "a sort of party whip."³⁶

Admiral Radford did not succeed in eliminating splits, and a fair number did go forward to the Secretary of Defense during his tenure. Major areas of disagreement concerned force structure and strategic planning. Even though the Joint Chiefs of Staff had adopted a strategic planning system in 1952 that included short-, mid-, and long-range plans, during the Radford period they could never agree on a mid-range plan. It was in 1958, after the Admiral's retirement, that they sent the first one, the Joint Strategic Objectives Plan, to the Secretary of Defense.

Admiral Radford's advocacy of the administration's "New Look" policies naturally led Eisenhower and Wilson to look to him for military advice, thereby reinforcing the practice of the Chairman's serving as the spokesman for the Joint Chiefs. Although the National Security Act Amendments of 1949 prohibited the Chairman from voting, this restriction was meaningless, since majority views did not necessarily prevail. Radford began sending his own views in a separate memorandum to the Secretary of Defense along with the formal position of the Joint Chiefs when there was a split.³⁷

On 15 August 1957 President Eisenhower chose General Nathan F. Twining, USAF, to succeed Admiral Radford as the third Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Less partisan than his predecessor, General Twining eased the acrimonious JCS relations that had typified the Radford tenure but gave up none of the prominence that Radford had gained for the position. As Chairman, General Twining



General Nathan F. Twining with his JCS colleagues, 1957. *Left to right:* General Thomas D. White, Chief of Staff, USAF; General Maxwell D. Taylor, Chief of Staff, USA; General Twining; Admiral Arleigh A. Burke, Chief of Naval Operations; and General Randolph McC. Pate, Commandant, USMC.

distanced himself from the Air Force on several crucial issues and impressed the President as being broad-gauged in his views.³⁸

By the late 1950s revolutionary advances in the technology of warfare and accompanying cost increases convinced President Eisenhower of the need for a more efficient

and cost-effective defense organization.³⁹ On 3 April 1958 Eisenhower forwarded reorganization proposals to Congress. "Separate ground, sea, and air warfare is gone forever," he said, and "strategic and tactical planning must be completely unified." He called for the organization of all combat forces into

unified commands, "singly led and prepared to fight as one, regardless of Service," and for clear command channels to these commands. Eisenhower judged the Joint Chiefs of Staff concept "essentially sound" and wanted no change in the composition or functions of the Chiefs. He did ask for removal of the statutory limit on the size of the Joint Staff, which had been set at 210 in the National Security Act Amendments of 1949, and requested added authority for the Chairman to assign duties to the Joint Staff and to select the Director of the Joint Staff with the approval of the Secretary of Defense. He also asked for removal of the prohibition against allowing the Chairman to vote.⁴⁰

In the ensuing congressional hearings, General Twining explained that the changes affecting his position would bring more efficient management. "Did any of you," he asked the members of the House Armed Services Committee, "ever try to manage an activity without having the authority to assign work to it?" Such was his position as Chairman. Technically, under current law, he continued, he would have to call a meeting of the Chiefs every time the Secretary of Defense asked him to have the Joint Staff look into a matter. Moreover, since the Director of the Joint Staff acted as "a sort of chief of staff" to the Chairman, it was essential to have harmonious relations between the Chairman and the Director. This was the rationale for having the Chairman, instead of the Chiefs, select the Director. On the other hand, General Twining considered removal of the prohibition against the Chairman's voting to be meaningless. "Every knowledgeable person is aware," he said, "that we do not vote in Joint Chiefs of Staff deliberation. If we did vote, the majority view could stifle any minority dissenting views. Therefore we do not vote and we do not intend to start voting."

Some in Congress feared that further strengthening of the chairmanship might lead to "a man on horseback" and an all-powerful general staff, based on the Prussian model. General Twining did his best to dispel such fears. "Civilian control is clearly delineated," he said, and, as a corporate body, the Joint Chiefs would retain "their present important powers." Numerous checks and balances would continue in force. "No one who understands what the Prussian experience was," the general assured the congressmen, "could believe that the current proposal could lead to that."⁴¹

Congress approved the President's proposals, and the DOD Reorganization Act of 1958 entered into force on 6 August 1958. It authorized the Joint Staff to perform such duties as the Joint Chiefs or the Chairman prescribed, allowed the Chairman "in consultation with the Joint Chiefs of Staff" to select the Director of the Joint Staff, and removed the restriction against the Chairman's voting. But, despite General Twining's assurances regarding a Prussian general staff, Congress included the following caveat: "The Joint Staff shall not operate or be organized as an overall Armed Forces General Staff and shall have no executive authority."⁴²

An Expanding Role during the 1960s

When General Twining retired after three years, President Eisenhower named General Lyman L. Lemnitzer, the Army Chief of Staff, to be Chairman. Lemnitzer took up his new duties on 1 October 1960. He had been Chairman for less than four months when John F. Kennedy became President. Preferring a flexible, informal style of leadership, Kennedy entered office suspicious of the formal NSC apparatus of the Eisenhower administration, including the JCS system.



General Lyman L. Lemnitzer with his JCS colleagues, 1961. *Left to right:* Admiral George W. Anderson, Jr., Chief of Naval Operations; General George H. Decker, Chief of Staff, USA; General Lemnitzer; General Curtis E. LeMay, Chief of Staff, USAF; and General David M. Shoup, Commandant, USMC.

The Bay of Pigs invasion fiasco and what Kennedy saw as the failure of the Joint Chiefs to speak out strongly in interdepartmental deliberations about the risks of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) operation led the new President temporarily to lose confidence in the Chiefs.

To set out exactly what he expected of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, President Kennedy issued National Security Action Memorandum (NSAM) 55 to General Lemnitzer on 28 June 1961. He regarded the JCS as his “principal military advisor,” responsible for both initiating advice to him and responding to requests for advice. He wanted their view

“direct and unfiltered.” While he looked to the Chiefs to present the military factors “without reserve or hesitation,” he also expected them to be “more than military men” and to help in fitting military requirements into the overall context of any situation.⁴³

In further reaction to the Bay of Pigs, President Kennedy recalled a former Army Chief of Staff, General Maxwell Taylor, to active duty at the White House as his military representative. The President asked Taylor to advise and assist him on military matters but stated that Taylor was not being interposed between the President and the Joint Chiefs. Even so, the new arrangement proved

awkward for both Taylor and the Chiefs. Fortunately, Taylor and Lemnitzer worked out arrangements to avoid competition and friction between the Military Representative and the Chiefs.⁴⁴

The issuance of NSAM 55 and the arrival of General Taylor at the White House helped to overcome President Kennedy's lack of confidence in the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and they soon developed a better relationship with the President. As the Chiefs gained experience working with the new administration, General Lemnitzer recognized the need for timely JCS responses to requests for military advice and for improved staff capabilities to meet the requirements of the President and Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara. To these ends, Lemnitzer established the Chairman's Special Studies Group to prepare broad studies and comparative analyses and designated an assistant to advise the Chiefs on counterinsurgency and special operations, an area of particular concern to President Kennedy.⁴⁵

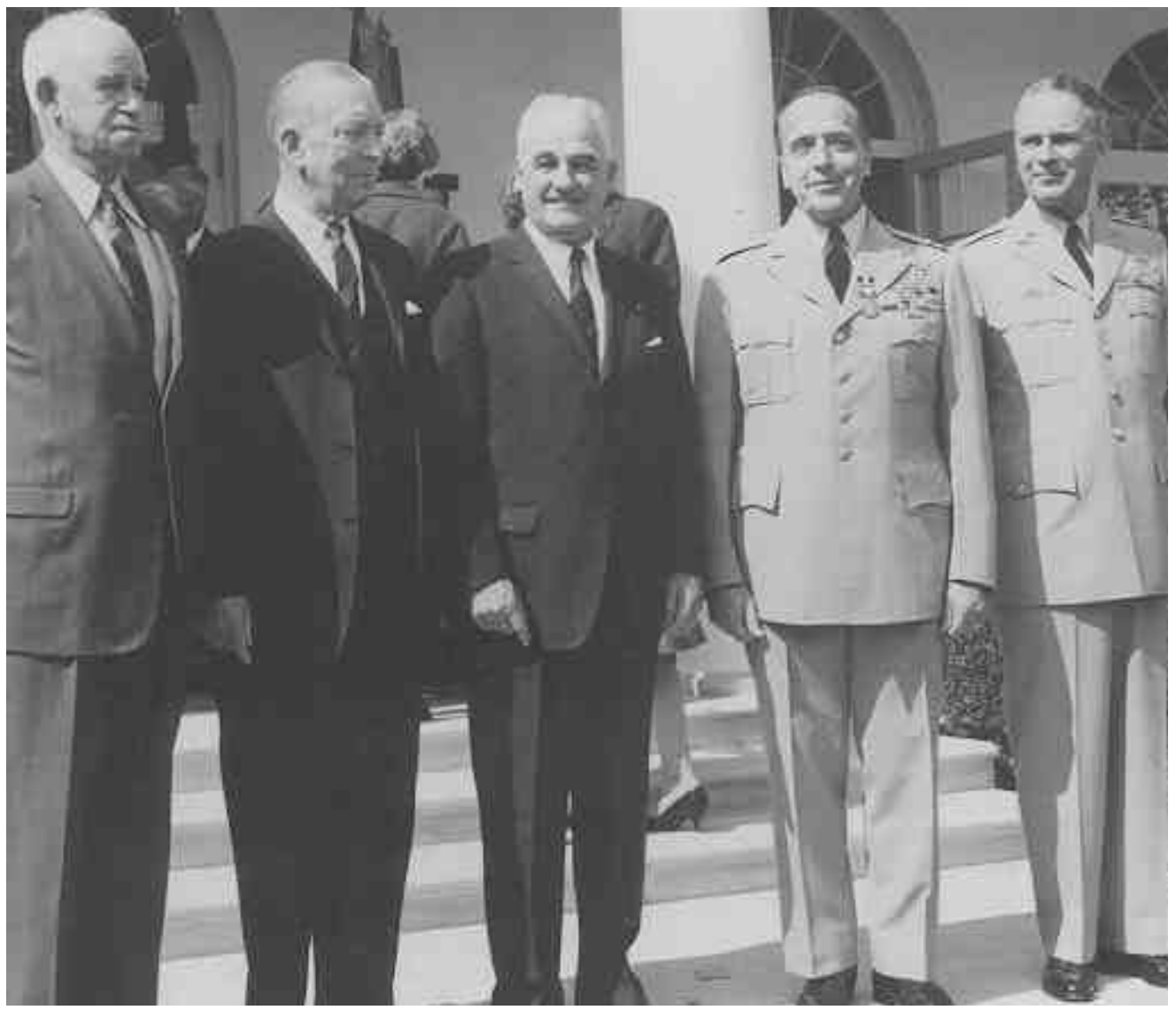
In the fall of 1962 President Kennedy named General Lemnitzer to be the Supreme Allied Commander, Europe. In a farewell speech before leaving for Europe, General Lemnitzer reviewed his role as Chairman. The interrelationship of the personalities of the Chairman and the Secretary of Defense, he observed, played an important role in the functioning of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He hastened to add that he had enjoyed "a very close personal and working relationship" with the Secretary as well as with the President. He reported that his views and those of the Chiefs had received a careful hearing by both the Secretary and the President, even if they had not always been adopted. It was only reasonable, he continued, that their advice was not heeded in every instance, for few decisions in Washington were purely military. Political, international, economic, and psychological factors must be weighed as

well. General Lemnitzer concluded with a plea not to change the JCS system. The fact that the Chiefs did not always agree, he said, was not a weakness to be avoided but a strength that provided reasoned alternatives on complex military issues for decision by the civilian authorities.⁴⁶

President Kennedy asked General Taylor to be the new Chairman. Kennedy and Taylor had formed a warm friendship while Taylor served at the White House, and the friendship continued after Taylor became Chairman on 1 October 1962. The President relied on General Taylor for military advice, and Taylor became the representative of the Chiefs in dealing with the President. Before departing the White House for the Pentagon, General Taylor discussed his role as Chairman with the President and expressed the wish to retain as much of their closeness as possible. Kennedy agreed and invited Taylor to telephone him directly whenever necessary, a privilege Taylor never used.⁴⁷

The close relationship of President Kennedy and Chairman Taylor was quickly evident. During the Cuban missile crisis of late October and November 1962, General Taylor participated in the NSC Executive Committee (EXCOMM), the select group of advisers Kennedy relied upon throughout the crisis. The EXCOMM met daily with the President at the White House. There General Taylor sat next to the Secretary of Defense and joined freely in the long debates over appropriate US actions. Although the President did not accept Taylor's recommendation for air strikes, he did later describe Taylor and Taylor's role as "absolutely first class."⁴⁸

General Taylor prepared carefully for the EXCOMM meetings. He discussed issues with the Chiefs so that he could present the JCS views at the White House. When the President made decisions affecting the military at these meetings, General Taylor immediately



General Maxwell D. Taylor, with his four predecessors, when he was sworn in as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1 October 1962. *Left to right:* General Bradley, Admiral Radford, General Twining, General Lemnitzer, and General Taylor.

called the Pentagon to have the Director of the Joint Staff inform the Chiefs. After each meeting, General Taylor met with the Chiefs to brief them and set in motion necessary actions to implement the President's decisions. The President relied upon Taylor to see that his policies were executed.⁴⁹

When Taylor retired as Army Chief of Staff in 1959, he had criticized the JCS system and called for its replacement with a single

chief of staff and advisory committee for policy matters.⁵⁰ During the Senate confirmation hearing on his nomination as Chairman, he was questioned about reorganization of the Joint Chiefs. Taylor was quick to assure the Senators of a change of mind during the intervening three years. He returned not as a crusader for change, he said, but, rather, he wanted to see how the present system worked with a new team in a new atmosphere.⁵¹

Taylor had also criticized both Admiral Radford and General Twining as Chairmen. He had objected to their role as advocates for the defense and foreign policies of the administration. Here, too, he had changed his mind. "With the opportunity to observe the problems of the President at closer range," he said,

I have come to understand the importance of an intimate, easy relationship, born of friendship and mutual regard, between the President and the Chiefs. It is particularly important in the case of the Chairman, who works more closely with the President and the Secretary of Defense than do the Service Chiefs. The Chairman should be a true believer in the foreign policy and military strategy of the administration which he serves or, at least, feel that he and his colleagues are assured an attentive hearing on those matters for which the Joint Chiefs of Staff have a responsibility.⁵²

In one criticism, however, General Taylor did not change his mind. As Army Chief of Staff, he had resented efforts by the Chairman to impose consensus on the Chiefs or to obtain it by compromise. Upon becoming Chairman, Taylor told Secretary McNamara that he would respect the individual views of the Chiefs; he felt any dissent should be reported to the Secretary and even the President without trying to circumvent the issue by "non-committal or ambiguous statements." Taylor kept this pledge, and the number of splits reaching the Secretary of Defense increased substantially while Taylor was Chairman.⁵³

Lyndon B. Johnson, who succeeded to the presidency in November 1963, following the assassination of John Kennedy, shared his predecessor's preference for informal advisory groups rather than a formalized NSC system. It was only natural, therefore, that he turned to General Taylor, instead of the Joint Chiefs as a body, for military advice. Taylor and the Chiefs

did seek and obtain an early meeting with Johnson. On that occasion, General Taylor called the President's attention to NSAM 55 and stressed the importance he and the Chiefs attached to that guidance. The new President retained the directive without change.⁵⁴

General Earle G. Wheeler, USA, became Chairman in July 1964. Although he and Johnson had had little contact prior to this appointment, the President soon was addressing Wheeler by his nickname (except that he called Wheeler "Buz" instead of "Bus"). As US involvement in Vietnam grew, General Wheeler went more and more frequently to the White House. He was included in the small group that advised the President on key decisions in the war. General Wheeler later explained Johnson's reliance on him as a matter of convenience. It was simply easier for him to represent the Chiefs than to assemble five busy men on short notice. The Chiefs were not unhappy with the procedure, Wheeler told an interviewer near the end of his term, and were satisfied to rely on him as their representative to the President. Wheeler consulted the Chiefs before meetings with the President, and afterwards reported to them "practically verbatim" what had occurred.⁵⁵

President Johnson's use of small, informal groups of advisers evolved into the "Tuesday Lunch," a group initially consisting of his national security assistant and the Secretaries of State and Defense, who met to discuss important policy issues over lunch. In time, General Wheeler became a regular attendee at the Tuesday luncheons. Discussions were not limited to military issues and ranged across the full spectrum of presidential interests. General Wheeler, of course, was looked to on military questions. But, he said, "Mr. Johnson didn't confine me to commenting on military affairs at all."⁵⁶

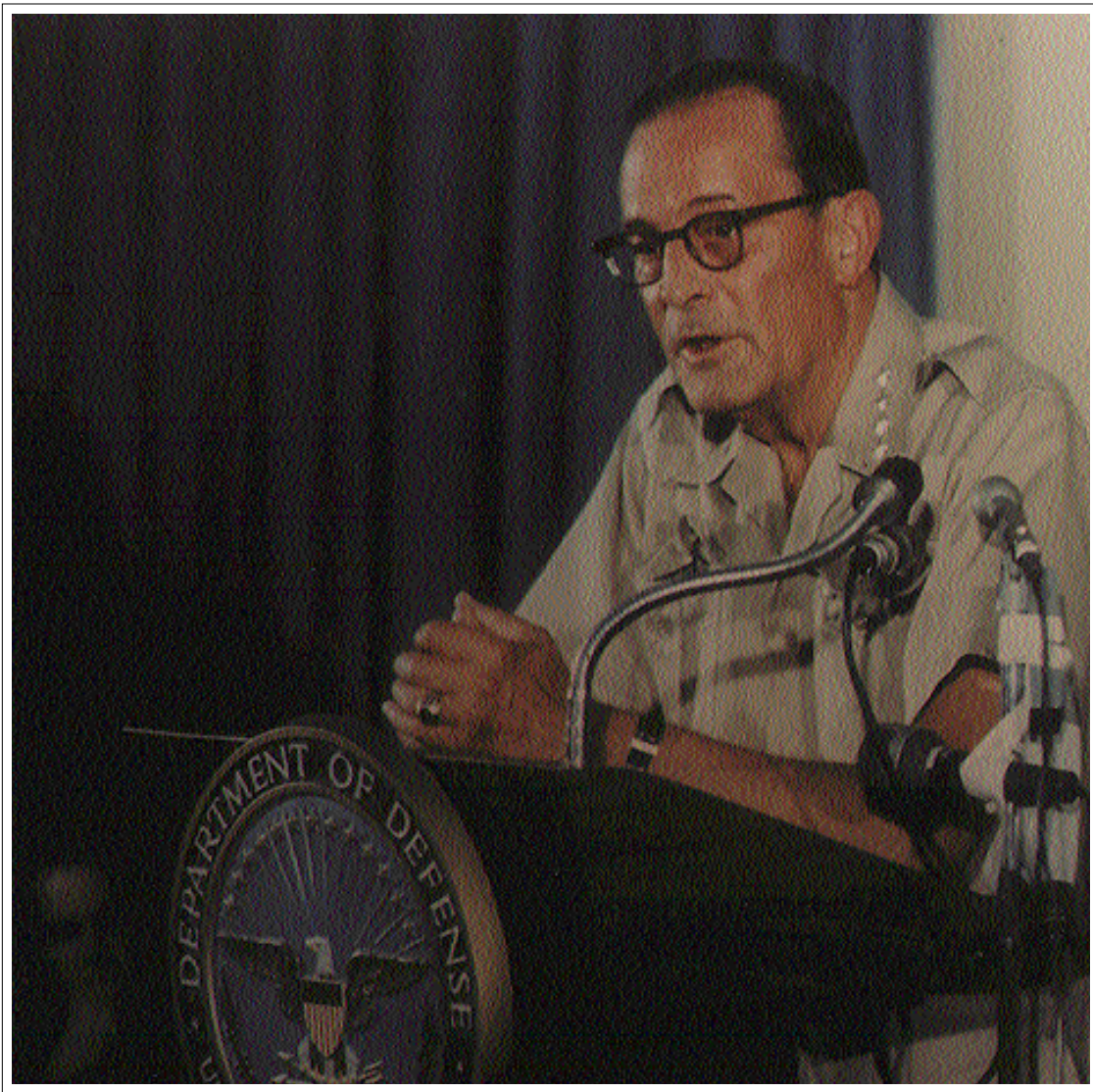
During the summer of 1967, General Wheeler suffered a slight heart attack. He



General Maxwell D. Taylor and Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara in the National Military Command Center, 1963.

offered his resignation so that the President could name a new Chairman, but Johnson would not hear of it. "Now Buz," he said, "I don't want anyone else as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.... You have never given me a bad piece of advice." At Johnson's request, special legislation in mid-1968 extended Wheeler for another year beyond the statutory four-year limit of his term.⁵⁷ It must be said, though, that Wheeler was out of sympathy with a range of administration policies, particularly the level and scope of the US effort in Vietnam.

Although General Wheeler carried on in the Taylor tradition as spokesman and representative of the Joint Chiefs, he differed with the Taylor approach on splits. By 1965, after there had been a major turnover in the membership of the Joint Chiefs from the Kennedy era, Wheeler and the Chiefs decided that their advice might be more influential with the Secretary of Defense and the President if it was an agreed position. Accordingly, they began a conscious effort to resolve their disagreements rather than sending them to the Secretary of Defense for decision, and the number of



General Earle G. Wheeler at a press conference in Saigon, 1969.

JCS splits dropped sharply.⁵⁸ Unanimity did not, however, bring a noticeable increase in JCS influence.

When Richard M. Nixon became President in January 1969, General Wheeler continued in his role as principal military adviser. President Nixon reinstituted a structured NSC apparatus, relying on the NSC for advice on major decisions and establishing a number of subsidiary bodies. General Wheeler represented the Joint Chiefs at NSC meetings, and he or his representative

participated in all the other NSC groups.⁵⁹ He was also included in the small informal meetings at the White House when President Nixon considered Vietnam issues. Nixon requested Congress to extend Wheeler as Chairman for yet another year.⁶⁰

General Wheeler retired on 2 July 1970 after an unprecedented six years as Chairman. The last two years of that tour were increasingly frustrating for him. Public opposition to the war in Vietnam mounted, and presidential decisions to halt the bombing of



Admiral Thomas H. Moorer with President Richard M. Nixon aboard the USS *Saratoga*, 1969.

North Vietnam and to withdraw US combat forces contradicted Wheeler's advice. Shortly after retiring, Wheeler lamented to his old friend and JCS colleague, former Army Chief of Staff General Harold K. Johnson: "Frankly, Johnny, I feel that I have been a colossal failure."⁶¹ Nonetheless, Earle Wheeler, together with Maxwell Taylor, firmly established the prominent role of the Chairman and the practice of the Chairman serving as spokesman and representative of the Chiefs with the Secretary of Defense and the President and

within the NSC system. Every Chairman since has maintained that role.

Problems and Frustrations during the 1970s

Admiral Thomas H. Moorer succeeded General Wheeler. The new Chairman had spent most of the 1960s commanding first the Pacific and then the Atlantic Fleet and was more the straightforward commander and less the consensus-seeker than his predecessor.

Henry Kissinger, President Nixon's National Security Adviser, called Moorer "a canny bureaucratic infighter" and said that "what his views lacked in elegance they made up in explicitness."⁶²

During his nomination hearing Admiral Moorer expounded on the JCS system and the role of the Chairman. He noted the gradual evolution in the authority and influence of the Chairman since the position had been created in 1949 and commented on the wisdom of this trend. Yet, he believed there should be limits to the evolution. The JCS system, he said, was designed to permit "the expression of individual views of each Chief on matters of national importance." The Chairman, he continued, should not be reticent in expressing his views on issues before the Chiefs, but he must also prepare the agenda and manage the Joint Staff in a way that encouraged full consideration of opposing views. The "melding of different service views into strategic guidance and policy," he concluded, "are [*sic*] not evils to be abolished but... healthy values to be preserved."⁶³

As the spokesman and representative of the Joint Chiefs, Admiral Moorer attended NSC meetings and sat on both the Senior Review Group (SRG), the mini-National Security Council of the Nixon administration, and the Washington Special Actions Group (WSAG), the administration's crisis management body. He held the same views as President Nixon and Henry Kissinger on many issues. In periods of crisis, such as the Lam Son 719 operation into Laos in March 1971 and the Arab-Israeli war of October 1973, they were in direct telephone contact with him several times a day to get the latest operational information and to relay directions. In response, Admiral Moorer took action in the name of the Chiefs and informed them afterwards. It was, he said, "the only practical way" when you were dealing "in real time."⁶⁴

When Admiral Moorer retired on 1 July 1974, after a four-year term, General George S. Brown, USAF, became Chairman. His nearly four years as Chairman in the mid-1970s proved a particularly difficult period for the United States and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Five weeks after General Brown assumed his new position, Richard Nixon resigned and Gerald Ford became President. With no transition and little preparation, General Brown and the Chiefs had to learn quickly to deal with a new President.

Eight months later, at the end of April 1975, South Vietnam surrendered to North Vietnam. This event marked the failure of a twenty-five-year US effort to maintain a free and independent South Vietnam. Public and congressional frustration with the outcome of the Vietnam War and the military was reflected in tighter defense budgets throughout the Brown period.

In addition, General Brown had a penchant for public remarks that embarrassed both him and the administration. In a speech in October 1974, he referred to the undue influence of Jews and the Israeli lobby in the United States. Although he subsequently apologized for the remarks, a public outcry ensued, and President Ford publicly admonished the Chairman.⁶⁵ Two years later during a press interview, General Brown made comments that seemed disparaging of Britain, Israel, and Iran. He later expanded and explained his remarks to claim that he intended no criticism,⁶⁶ but his reputation as a Chairman who spoke first and considered the consequences later was not as easily corrected.

Jimmy Carter succeeded Gerald Ford as President in January 1977; he was the third President General Brown served as Chairman in less than three years. Moreover, Brown served three Secretaries of Defense in the same period—James Schlesinger, Donald Rumsfeld, and Harold Brown. These frequent



General George S. Brown with Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld, 1976.

changes in leaders and sometimes in policies further complicated General Brown's task. He did, however, maintain the authority and influence of the Chairman. He served as spokesman and representative of the Joint Chiefs, and he attended NSC meetings and participated in the principal NSC groups in both the Ford and Carter administrations. General Brown became ill early in 1978 and was absent much of the time during his last months as Chairman. He retired on 20 June

1978, ten days short of completing four full years as Chairman.

General David C. Jones, USAF, became the next Chairman. He was just finishing four years as Air Force Chief of Staff and brought considerable experience as a JCS member to his new job. At his nomination hearing, General Jones said he believed that the Chairman had a responsibility to take the lead within the Chiefs to assure adequate attention to all national security issues.⁶⁷ But, over the



next four years, he would come to a much more expansive view of what the Chairman's role should be.

During his first term, General Jones supported ratification of the SALT II agreement. He also oversaw planning for the failed Iranian hostage rescue attempt. As a consequence, when President Carter nominated him for a second term as Chairman in May 1980, the renomination sparked criticism in Congress. With a presidential election campaign approaching and defense policy a major issue, some senators thought Jones was too closely identified with the Carter administration and its defense policies.

Press stories soon circulated that, to avoid a fight over confirmation for a second term, General Jones had privately agreed to resign if Carter was not reelected. Jones flatly denied any such deal. In a statement on 4 June 1980, he said that by law the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff served at the pleasure of the President and any arrangement with members of Congress to resign in the future would be inconsistent with the statute. He went on to add:

The integrity of the Chairman's office is an overriding consideration and I consider it totally inappropriate for senior military officers to adopt the tradition of political appointees of offering resignations whenever an Administration changes.⁶⁸

In his reconfirmation hearing General Jones defended his support of the Carter administration. Citing the cherished American principle of civilian control of the military, he believed it absolutely essential that discipline among senior military officers, especially in

Washington, be as firm as that among commanders in the field. When a commander issued an order, he must have confidence the order would be carried out; the Commander in Chief must have that same confidence. General Jones considered that he had a critical responsibility to make the strongest possible case for his views on national defense to the Secretary of Defense and the President in deliberative sessions. Once he had made that case and once a decision was rendered, he continued, "I have a clear obligation, by law and by personal conviction, to carry out that order even if I would have decided otherwise." The Senate confirmed Jones for a second term, which began on 21 June 1980.⁶⁹ General Jones continued as Chairman when Ronald Reagan became President in January 1981.

Proposals for Change in the 1980s

By 1981 over six years of experience as a JCS member had convinced General Jones of the need for fundamental change in the JCS system. He reviewed all earlier proposals for JCS reform and in February 1982, four months before his term ended, set out his proposals. He found persistent shortcomings in the system—diffused authority and responsibility, military advice that was neither timely nor useful, service domination of the joint system, and Service Chiefs who faced a built-in conflict of interest in their dual role as JCS member and service leader. As a remedy, General Jones proposed increased authority for the Chairman. Specifically, he would make the Chairman, rather than the corporate Chiefs, the principal military adviser to the President, the National Security Council, and the Secretary of Defense; give the Chairman oversight of the unified and specified commands; provide the Chairman a four-star deputy; and have the Joint Staff work for the

General George S. Brown with General David C. Jones, Chief of Staff, USAF, 1974.



General David C. Jones presides over a meeting of the Joint Chiefs of Staff with the unified and specified commanders, 22 January 1982. *Left to right:* General John A. Wickham, Jr., USA, US Forces Korea; General Edward C. Meyer, Chief of Staff, USA; General Bernard W. Rogers, USA, US European Command; Admiral Thomas B. Hayward, Chief of Naval Operations; General Donn A. Starry, USA, US Readiness Command; Admiral Robert L. J. Long, USN, Pacific Command; General Robert H. Barrow, Commandant, USMC; General James V. Hartinger, USAF, Aerospace Defense Command; General Lew Allen, Jr., Chief of Staff, USAF; Admiral Harry D. Train II, USN, Atlantic Command; General Jones; General James R. Allen, USAF, Military Airlift Command; General Bennie L. Davis, USAF, Strategic Air Command; and Lieutenant General Robert C. Kingston, USA, Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force.

Chairman rather than the JCS. Further, General Jones wanted to limit service staff involvement in the joint process by requiring the Joint Staff to support JCS members on joint matters. Finally, he hoped to broaden the training, experience, and rewards for joint duty in an effort to bring better people into joint assignments and thus improve the quality of joint planning and advice.⁷⁰

The House Armed Services Committee held extensive hearings on reorganization proposals for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the House of Representatives passed a bill that incorporated the principal elements of General Jones's plan.⁷¹ But the Senate and the Reagan administration opposed any change and no further action resulted.



John Ficara—Newsweek

General David C. Jones and General John W. Vessey, Jr., in the Chairman's office, May 1982.

With General Jones's retirement in June 1982, President Reagan named General John W. Vessey, Jr., USA, as Chairman. After reviewing various recommendations for reform, Vessey and the Service Chiefs found themselves in agreement with most of them but concluded that many of the changes could be made without legislation. As a result of their actions, the quality of the Joint Staff improved as did its capacity for analyzing budgetary and programmatic issues. The Chiefs also proposed putting the Chairman directly in the chain of command, but Congress rejected this proposal. They also pointed out to Secretary of Defense Caspar W. Weinberger that there were more military officers assigned to the "civilian" Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) staff than to the Joint

Staff. However, not much progress was made in resolving this imbalance.

General Vessey and the Service Chiefs moved on other fronts to strengthen the joint system. A Joint Requirements Management Board was established. With the approval of Secretary Weinberger, Vessey acted as spokesman for the commanders in chief (CINCs) of the unified and specified commands for operations and requirements. Shortly after taking office, General Vessey ordered a review of the major CINC contingency plans aimed at refining JCS oversight of these fundamental products of the joint system. Vessey met with the CINCs in Washington on a regular basis and ensured that they became regularly involved in the Defense Resource Board's programming and budgeting activities.



General John W. Vessey, Jr., with President Ronald Reagan in Secretary of Defense Caspar W. Weinberger's office, 1984. *Left to right:* Major General Colin L. Powell, Military Assistant to the Secretary of Defense; Secretary Weinberger; General Vessey; William H. Taft IV, Deputy Secretary of Defense; President Reagan.

To improve JCS continuity, General Vessey gained agreement to end a procedure that frequently had resulted in several Service Chiefs serving as acting Chairman in the space of a week. At Vessey's suggestion, the Chiefs agreed that each Service Chief would be designated to serve as acting Chairman for a three-month period on a rotational basis. General Vessey in turn, kept the Chief designated to act for him abreast of his activities. The JCS believed that this new procedure

made General Jones's proposal for a Vice Chairman unnecessary.

General Vessey quickly formed a close relationship with Secretary Weinberger and persuaded President Reagan to meet with the Joint Chiefs on a quarterly basis. While he was extremely sensitive to his responsibilities for maintaining civilian control of the military, Secretary Weinberger realized the need for decentralized execution of the President's policies and decisions. Accordingly, Weinberger

gave Vessey authority to direct operations on his behalf. Vessey, in turn, exercised this authority within the context of the joint system.⁷²

Together, these changes led to a more united and forceful Joint Chiefs of Staff and further enhanced the position of the Chairman as their representative. Still, situations arose that demonstrated weaknesses in the joint system. The US military intervention in Grenada in late October 1983 succeeded but raised troubling questions about interoperability and cooperation among the services. At nearly the same time as the Grenada action, the deaths of 241 US Marines in a terrorist bombing of a Marine barracks in Lebanon brought criticism of a cumbersome military chain of command.

The events in Grenada and Lebanon fueled continuing public criticism of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. During 1983 the House of Representatives passed a bill to reorganize the JCS and strengthen the position of the Chairman,⁷³ and in the fall of 1984 the Senate adopted similar legislation.⁷⁴ The new law made the Chairman the spokesman for the CINCs on operational requirements, allowed him to determine when issues under JCS consideration would be decided, and authorized him (rather than the corporate Joint Chiefs of Staff) to select officers assigned to the Joint Staff. The law also increased the tour length for Joint Staff assignments and required appropriate consideration of Joint Staff assignment performance in the promotion and assignment policies of the services.⁷⁵

The 1984 law did little more than recognize existing practices and did not satisfy JCS critics. Several influential journals and “think tanks” joined the call for JCS reform.⁷⁶ During the spring of 1985, the House Armed Services Committee began consideration of a much stronger bill that would make the Chairman, instead of the corporate Chiefs, the principal military adviser to the President,

the Secretary of Defense, and the National Security Council; place the Chairman in the chain of command; designate the Chairman to supervise the CINCs; have the Joint Staff work for the Chairman alone; and provide for a deputy chairman.⁷⁷

In an effort to forestall the growing criticism, in June 1985 President Reagan appointed a Blue Ribbon Commission on defense management to examine progress already made in improving the management, organization, and decision-making procedures of the Department of Defense and propose further changes if needed. The objectives the President listed for the commission included review of JCS responsibilities. He named David Packard, a former Deputy Secretary of Defense, to head the commission.⁷⁸

With the reorganization issue still unresolved, General Vessey retired from active service on 30 September 1985, and Admiral William J. Crowe, Jr., USN, succeeded him. Commanding the US Pacific Command when selected to be Chairman, Admiral Crowe had not served as a Service Chief. Consequently, he brought to the chairmanship the perspective of a CINC, rather than a JCS member.

Just two weeks after Admiral Crowe became Chairman, the Senate Armed Services Committee released a lengthy report, *Defense Organization: The Need for Change*. Several years in preparation, the report was extremely critical of the JCS. Among some ninety-one specific recommendations was a call for abolition of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and its replacement with a joint military advisory council composed of a chairman and a four-star officer from each service. These officers would be on final tours before retirement; they would have no service responsibilities and would be free to devote their entire attention to the task of advising the President, the National Security Council, and the Secretary of Defense. Such a council, the

authors of the report hoped, would give the President better military advice—advice free of service parochialism.⁷⁹

Subsequently, in November 1985, the House of Representatives passed the JCS reorganization bill that its Armed Services Committee had considered the previous spring.⁸⁰ Then, the Senate Armed Services Committee began hearings on the basis of its recently released report. Admiral Crowe, the new Chairman, appeared before the committee on 12 December. Acknowledging his limited experience as a JCS member, he nonetheless set out his view of the JCS system as the best mechanism the nation had for coordinating preparations for war and for formulating advice for the Secretary of Defense and the President. Even though he opposed replacing the Chiefs with a new body of military advisers, he differed with the position of his predecessor on JCS reform. Admiral Crowe favored designating the Chairman, instead of the corporate Chiefs, as the principal military adviser so that there would be no question about his right to express his own views on military issues. He also supported giving the Chairman sole control of the Joint Staff and inserting him in the chain of command from the President and Secretary of Defense to the CINCs. Based on his recent experience as a CINC, Crowe also wanted the authority of the CINCs strengthened. In subsequent testimony, Admiral Crowe supported the creation of a deputy chairman.⁸¹

Pressure for JCS reform mounted. In February 1986 the Packard Commission called for revision of the law to accomplish various changes in military organization, including all of Admiral Crowe's recommendations.⁸² Taking care to preserve his good relations with the Chiefs, Crowe worked behind the scenes to encourage support for the reforms that would increase the Chairman's authority, and he changed some JCS procedures in advance of

the anticipated legislation.⁸³ In April, President Reagan endorsed the Packard Commission's findings and ordered implementation of all the recommendations that did not require legislation.⁸⁴ The conclusion came in September when both the House and Senate passed reform legislation.⁸⁵ President Reagan signed the legislation on 1 October 1986.⁸⁶

A New Law and Enhanced Authority

The Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act** of 1 October 1986 climaxed a four-and-one-half-year process that had begun with the proposals of General Jones in February 1982. The result was the first major reorganization of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in almost thirty years and the most significant change to the joint system since the National Security Act of 1947. The new act greatly enhanced the authority of the Chairman, established the position of Vice Chairman, bestowed wide new powers on the CINCs, and provided for actions and procedures to increase the prestige of and rewards for joint duty in an attempt to improve the functioning of the joint system and the quality of joint military advice.

The Goldwater-Nichols Act designated the Chairman, in place of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, as the principal military adviser to the President, the National Security Council, and the Secretary of Defense. In carrying out this responsibility, the Chairman would consult with the Chiefs and the CINCs and would present a range of military advice and opinions as he considered appropriate. The other

** The act was named for Senator Barry Goldwater and Representative William Nichols, the chairmen of the Senate and House Armed Services Committees.

JCS members continued as military advisers, submitting their advice when they disagreed with the Chairman or when it was requested by the President, the National Security Council, or the Secretary of Defense.

The 1986 act also changed the provisions for the Chairman's term of office. Now he would serve a term of two years beginning on 1 October of odd-numbered years and might be reappointed for two additional terms, for a total of six years, except in time of war when there would be no limit on reappointment. The act prescribed that candidates to be Chairman must have served as Vice Chairman, Service Chief, or CINC although the President could waive this requirement. The act retained the language of the National Security Act Amendments of 1949, which specified that the Chairman would outrank all other officers of the armed forces but would not exercise military command over the Joint Chiefs or any of the armed forces. Further, the act authorized the Chairman to convene meetings of the Joint Chiefs and, subject to the authority and direction of the President and the Secretary of Defense, to preside over the Joint Chiefs, provide the agenda for these meetings, assist the Chiefs in carrying out their business as promptly as practicable, and determine when issues under consideration should be decided. The act also placed the Joint Staff under the direction and control of the Chairman instead of the corporate Chiefs.

The new act assigned the functions previously the responsibility of the corporate Joint Chiefs to the Chairman and gave him additional duties. Subject to the authority, direction, and control of the President and the Secretary of Defense, the Chairman was now charged in broad terms with assistance to the President and the Secretary of Defense in the strategic direction of the armed forces; strategic and contingency planning; advice to the Secretary of Defense on military require-

ments, programs, and budgets; and development of the joint doctrine, training, and education of the armed forces. His responsibilities also included providing US representation on the Military Staff Committee of the United Nations and other duties as prescribed by law or directed by the President and the Secretary of Defense. In his role as military adviser to the National Security Council, the Chairman was authorized, subject to the direction of the President, to attend NSC meetings. Finally, the 1986 act defined the chain of command as running from the President to the Secretary of Defense to the CINCs. The President might, however, direct that communications between himself or the Secretary of Defense and the CINCS be transmitted through the Chairman and might designate the Chairman to assist him and the Secretary "in performing their command function." While all combatant forces were assigned to the various CINCs, the services retained responsibility for training, organizing, and equipping them.

Admiral Crowe set about implementing those portions of the Goldwater-Nichols Act affecting the Joint Chiefs of Staff. It was not an easy task. With a Secretary of Defense and three Service Chiefs who were opposed to aspects of the new law, he had to tread carefully. In initial guidance for the Joint Staff, Crowe stated his intention to use the full extent of his new authority. Yet he did not want to offend the Service Chiefs unnecessarily. He continued a collegial approach in seeking consensus and relied on the Service Chiefs for their unique perspectives and experiences. But he did not hesitate to put items on the JCS agenda and bring them to decision or to forward his own advice when the Chiefs could not agree. He could now go to the Secretary of Defense and the President with full authority, attaching dissenting positions of the Chiefs as appropriate.⁸⁷



Ronald Reagan Library

Admiral William J. Crowe, Jr., briefs President Ronald Reagan at the White House, October 1987. *Left to right:* Admiral Crowe; Lieutenant General Colin L. Powell, Deputy Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs; Caspar W. Weinberger, Secretary of Defense; President Reagan.

Admiral Crowe moved to assume control of the Joint Staff. He alone was now responsible for its direction and no one could task it without his approval. He expanded the Joint Staff to include new directorates to assist him in the areas of interoperability, joint doctrine, and resource and budget matters. As a former unified commander, Admiral Crowe welcomed the added authority given the

CINCs—both the increased authority over their components and their enhanced role in budget and resource areas. He consulted closely and often with the CINCs and brought them to Washington regularly to participate in budget deliberations. He also took advantage of the Goldwater-Nichols Act to enhance the quality of the Joint Staff, which had suffered in the competition with the service staffs



Admiral William J. Crowe, Jr., with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1987. *Left to right:* General Alfred M. Gray, Jr., Commandant, USMC; Admiral Carlisle A. H. Trost, Chief of Naval Operations; General Larry D. Welch, Chief of Staff, USAF; General Carl E. Vuono, Chief of Staff, USA; Admiral Crowe; and General Robert T. Herres, USAF, Vice Chairman.

for the most talented officers. In 1987, during Operation EARNEST WILL, the first US operation after the enactment of Goldwater-Nichols, he used the Chairman's enhanced authority to create a joint task force to conduct the operation.

Admiral Crowe's successor, General Colin L. Powell, USA, was the first Chairman to serve his entire tenure under Goldwater-Nichols. While Crowe had deliberately moved gradually in making the transition from being first among equals on the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Powell came to the position determined to make full use of the Chairman's expanded

authority. Having served as Secretary Weinberger's Military Assistant and President Reagan's National Security Adviser, he brought to the chairmanship a broad national security perspective. Moreover, he already had a close working relationship with President George Bush, with whom he had worked at the White House when Powell was National Security Adviser and Bush was Vice President. His relationship with Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney also dated to this period, when Cheney had been House minority whip. The increased authority which Goldwater-Nichols gave the Chairman, General Powell's previous



General Colin L. Powell with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1991. *Left to right:* General Carl E. Mundy, Commandant, USMC; General Gordon R. Sullivan, Chief of Staff, USA; General Merrill A. McPeak, Chief of Staff, USAF; Admiral Frank B. Kelso II, Chief of Naval Operations; General Powell; Admiral David E. Jeremiah, Vice Chairman.

experience, and his relationship with the President and the Secretary gave him more latitude than most of his predecessors. The successful operation in Panama in 1989 and the victory over Iraq in 1991 further enhanced the Chairman's stature.

In dealing with both the Joint Staff and the JCS, General Powell cut through bureaucratic layers that he thought delayed and diluted advice. He abolished the Chairman's

Staff Group, which his predecessors had used to review Joint Staff papers before they reached the Chairman, and instead worked directly with the Joint Staff directorates. Formal meetings in "The Tank" became infrequent and consisted mainly of informational briefings. General Powell preferred to meet more informally with the Chiefs in his office, where they were less constrained by prepared service staff positions. During Operation



President William J. Clinton and General Colin L. Powell review the honor guard at General Powell's retirement ceremony, Fort Myer, Virginia, 30 September 1993.

DESERT STORM, for example, he met almost daily with the Chiefs in his office rather than in "The Tank."

In 1989 and 1990 when the Chiefs did not support his efforts to change strategy and force structure as the Cold War ended, General Powell convinced the Secretary and the President to endorse his position. Secretary Cheney then directed the Service Chiefs to implement the changes. General Powell also

led the efforts to expand the responsibilities of the Atlantic Command. Despite service opposition to some of his ideas, he fashioned it into a joint command designed to enhance the services' ability to fight as a team.⁸⁸

As a result of General Powell's active exercise of the authority which the Goldwater-Nichols Act gave the Chairman, the role of the Chairman expanded and the Chairman's influence increased considerably during his



Secretary of Defense Caspar W. Weinberger swears in General Robert T. Herres as the first Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 6 February 1987.

tenure. When he retired on 30 September 1993, the position of the Chairman was the strongest in its forty-four-year history.

Contributing to the increased power of the chairmanship was the new position of Vice Chairman. Goldwater-Nichols designated the Vice Chairman as the second-ranking officer in the US Armed Forces. In place of the previous practice of rotating the chairmanship among the Service Chiefs in the

absence of the Chairman, the law specified that the Vice Chairman would serve as Acting Chairman. While Goldwater-Nichols authorized the Vice Chairman to participate in all JCS meetings, it prohibited his voting unless he was acting as Chairman. This restriction was mainly symbolic, since the Joint Chiefs of Staff rarely formally voted. Nevertheless, it meant that the Vice Chairman was not a full member of the JCS.



A meeting in "The Tank" with President George Bush during Operation DESERT STORM, January 1991. *Left to right:* Brent Scowcroft, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs; Dick Cheney, Secretary of Defense; President Bush; General Colin L. Powell, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff; Admiral David E. Jeremiah, Vice Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff.

General Robert T. Herres, USAF, became the first Vice Chairman on 6 February 1987. He and Admiral Crowe worked out a list of the Vice Chairman's specific duties, which Secretary Weinberger approved. During Herres's tenure, the Vice Chairman's principal responsibilities lay in the area of requirements. He also served as the Chairman's representative on the Deputies Committee of the National Security Council. General Herres defined his role as not only substituting for

the Chairman but also extending the Chairman's influence.⁸⁹ Initially, he had to contend with the concern of some Service Chiefs that he was usurping some of their functions, but well before his retirement on 28 February 1990 the position of Vice Chairman had become an established institution.

The scope of the Vice Chairman's activities and the extent of his influence expanded during the tenure of Admiral David E. Jeremiah, USN, who became Vice Chairman

on 1 March 1990. Like General Herres, Admiral Jeremiah had principal responsibility for requirements and represented the Chairman in the interagency policy-making process. But rather than retaining the formal delineation of duties which had guided General Herres, General Powell and Admiral Jeremiah agreed that Jeremiah would support Powell across the whole range of the Chairman's responsibilities.⁹⁰

At Powell's urging and with the Service Chiefs' support, the Bush administration in 1991 sought legislation to make the Vice Chairman a full member of the JCS. The Senate passed such a bill unanimously, but the House approved a version that would have prohibited the Vice Chairman from informing Congress and the President when he differed with the Chairman. With the House and Senate deadlocked, General Powell worked to break the impasse. To a leading opponent of the Senate bill he wrote, "The most junior officer in the Armed Forces of the United States is entitled to express disagreement through channels to the next higher authority. How can we, in good conscience, deny that privilege to the second highest military officer in the Armed Forces as

a consequence of being elevated to membership on the Joint Chiefs of Staff?"⁹¹ General Powell's argument was persuasive. Public Law 102-484, signed by President Bush on 23 October 1992, made the Vice Chairman a full JCS member without restrictions.

Originally, the Chairman served as presiding officer of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He conveyed the advice of the Chiefs to the President, the National Security Council, and the Secretary of Defense and coordinated the activities of the JCS. Over the years, strategic requirements, the actions of individual Chairmen, and legislation brought a slow, steady increase in the prominence and responsibility of the position. The Chairman became the representative and spokesman of the Chiefs; Presidents and Secretaries of Defense turned to him for military advice. The Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 officially recognized this change. From being first among equals on the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Chairman had become the principal military adviser to the President and other civilian leaders charged with the security of the United States.

